

# Frequently Asked Questions: Program Learning Outcomes Inventory

## May 2015

### **1. Please help me to understand why are we doing this project now and why is it important?**

Since the 2012/13 academic year, the Senate Committee on Learning and Teaching has engaged in discussions regarding learning outcomes and learning and teaching goals and values. After conducting a thorough review of the issue and initiatives already in place at UVic, the committee developed updated university-wide learning outcomes. To reaffirm prior Senate intent, the purpose of published university-wide learning outcomes is to articulate the learning outcomes students will have the opportunity to achieve during their education at the University of Victoria. These learning outcomes include a broad range of high level skills that are relevant across all disciplines. They provide clear guidance about the skills and capacities students can expect to achieve as part of their UVic education, without imposing any prescriptive requirements on how these will be delivered. Students in different programs will achieve these outcomes in different ways and to different extents. Faculties, units and programs are encouraged to interpret these outcomes in ways that are discipline-specific and should use the university-wide learning outcomes as guide posts for developing program-specific and course-specific learning outcomes.

Following thorough analysis and consultation, the [University Learning Outcomes](#) were passed by Senate on May 2, 2014 and were entered into the university calendar for 2014-2015. Simultaneous to this work, provincial requirements for accountability, trends in accreditation and international developments have all made it increasingly advisable for the university to be able to articulate, at least in some general way, how our academic units support our students in achieving the learning goals we have set for them. It is anticipated that the province will ask us to assess to what extent we meet our goals in the years ahead.

The University wishes to prepare in a considered manner for what may be required, well ahead of anything being imposed externally. In this way we can take a leadership role in how the university's curricular offerings are assessed. With this in mind, we have developed a simple template to allow each unit to report on and highlight some of its curricular achievements and to reflect on progress to-date towards achieving curricular learning goals for students.

### **2. What do I do if my unit has not yet discussed and/or documented our Program Learning Outcomes?**

For those units who have not yet discussed and/or publicly documented their Learning Outcomes, many resources are provided to assist you on the [Learning and Teaching Centre](#) website. Here you will find a quick start guide, [A Guide to Program and Curricular Planning at UVic](#), tips for assessing learning outcomes, links to the experiential education mapping project, and so on. In addition, Teresa Dawson in the Learning and Teaching Centre is available for consultation for academic units by appointment. Please contact [lrc@uvic.ca](mailto:lrc@uvic.ca) or [tdawson@uvic.ca](mailto:tdawson@uvic.ca) to request assistance.

### **3. How are programs counted and for how many programs do I need to fill out this form?**

This form is designed to minimise the work required. Many academic units have developed general program learning outcomes that apply to all their undergraduate programs. If this is the case for you, simply complete one form for all of them or specify only any really significant differences. E.g. you might have a BA, BA Hons, a Minor, a combined program and a BSc. This counts as 5 programs in total but for many units the goals need only be specified once or with a simple addendum (For example: "In addition, for the Hons program students will...") In which case your form covers 5 out of 5 of your programs. Alternatively you might have one program that is completely different but all the others can be handled together, in which case you need only do two forms.

**4. What do you mean by “learning outcomes” and what is the difference between “goals” and “outcomes”?**

There is a considerable background literature on these questions summarised in the Senate documents that were brought forward for discussion, including a substantial background paper. However, for the purposes of this activity we are less concerned with precise definitions and more concerned with collecting the good work that has been done in whatever way is most appropriate for academic units who have already determined their goals or outcomes in their own way. We do not want to make units rework their goals if they are already specified in a particular form that works for that unit. In general, goals are aspirations for students whereas outcomes are more specific aspects that allow students to a) “know” b) “be” or “do” something differently as a result of taking a program. Units who have completed this task already often begin by stating an overall vision for the students in their program and then specify outcomes in the form of “In our program, you will have the opportunity to do the following:....” OR “students who graduate from our program will ...”

**5. Do I have to articulate how we attain every university wide learning outcome in our program(s)?**

Not at this time but we would like to know if you have established a method for assessing success in attaining your goals or outcomes.

**6. Are we required to document learning outcomes for our Graduate programs as well?**

No, at this time we are asking you only to reflect on your undergraduate offerings.

**7. What do you mean by the unique goals to showcase why students should come to UVic?**

Following on from the examples above students might have some unique opportunities they would not get in other places. For example, is there a unique archive, lab, field course, etc. they can access here? Are there faculty members who work in particular areas of interest who will share research opportunities with them? Is a co-op or other experiential learning opportunity available? “In our program students also have the opportunity to (highlight special or signature opportunities.....)” These could also be pedagogical in nature (unique approaches to teaching, or working one-on-one with a faculty member on original research, can be very attractive to an undergraduate).

**8. Communicating with students**

Units are strongly encouraged to communicate the results of their hard work in determining the learning outcomes for their program(s) to students by means of their website and syllabi or course outlines. Regularly revisiting these goals and reviewing progress towards them can be powerful tools for students.

**9. We have learning outcomes for our program(s) but have not been able to assess their impact. What should we do?**

Learning outcomes assessment is a complex field and we are not expecting detailed rubrics at this stage. While many professional schools and even academic societies are starting to look at learning outcomes assessment in more detail, we are only asking colleagues to consider a few simple and feasible measures for demonstrating that you achieve what you hope to for your students. Beginning to think about this now, and starting some general conversations, should allow us to be proactive if we are asked such questions in future by the province.

**10. How does the learning outcomes collection process connect to the Enhanced Planning Project?**

The two projects are highly related. The UVic Learning Outcomes Inventory project is designed to support academic units in their enhanced planning process. For more information on enhanced planning please contact Dr. Sarah Blackstone, Advisor to the Provost on Special Projects, at [blackstone@uvic.ca](mailto:blackstone@uvic.ca) .